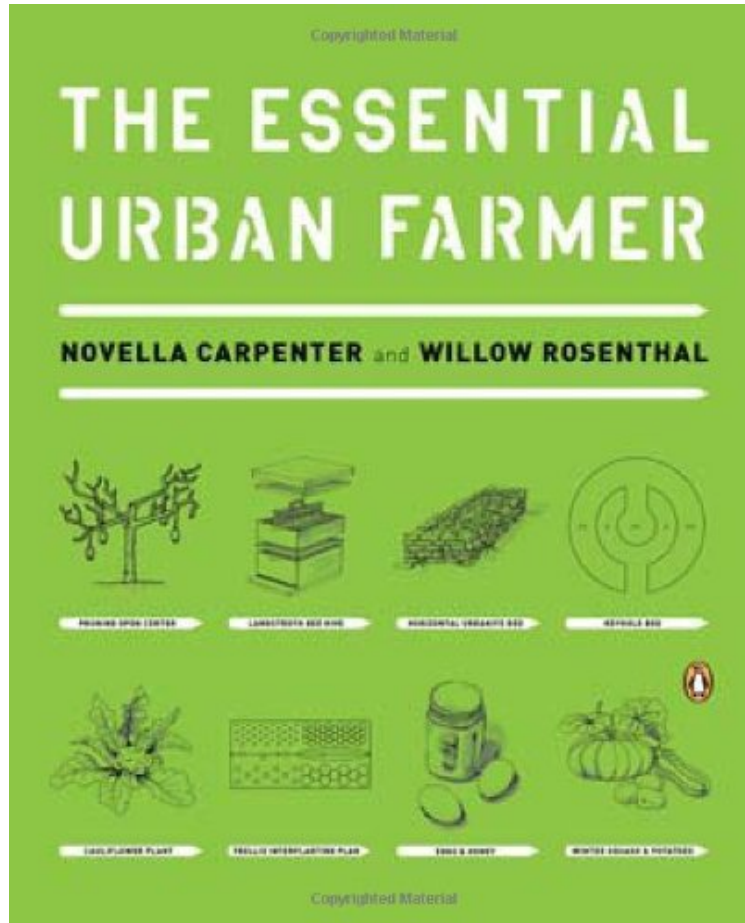


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The Essential Urban Farmer

Novella Carpenter, Willow Rosenthal
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Novella Carpenter, Willow Rosenthal : The Essential Urban Farmer before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Essential Urban Farmer:

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The "how-to" guide for a new generation of farmers from the author of Farm City and a leading urban garden educator. In this indispensable guide, Farm City author Novella Carpenter and Willow Rosenthal share their experience as successful urban farmers and provide practical blueprints-complete with rich visual material-for novice and experienced growers looking to bring the principles of ethical food to the city streets. The Essential Urban Farmer guides readers from day one to market day, advising on how to find the perfect site, design a landscape, and cultivate

crops. For anyone who has ever grown herbs on windowsills, or tomatoes on fire escapes, this is an invaluable volume with the potential to change our menus, our health, and our cities forever.

"Organic farming in the city is so unexpected-yet it is the surest way to rebuild the vital connection between our food and how it is grown. This lucidly written, encyclopedic volume-which contains everything from homemade fertilizer recipes to chicken coop blueprints-is the single most useful resource I know for all urban dwellers." -Alice Waters

About the Author
Novella Carpenter grew up in rural Idaho and Washington State. She went to University of Washington in Seattle where she majored in Biology and English. She later studied under Michael Pollan at Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism for two years. She's had many odd jobs including: assassin bug handler, book editor, media projectionist, hamster oocyte collector, and most recently, journalist. Her writing has appeared in Salon.com, Saveur.com, sfgate.com (the SF Chronicle's website), and Mother Jones. She has been cultivating her farm in the city for over ten years now, and her neighbors still think she's crazy. It all started with a few chickens, then some bees, until she had a full-blown farm near downtown Oakland, where she lives today.

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INTRODUCTION
Willow and I first bonded over urban farming. We were both growing vegetables, beekeeping, and raising chickens and ducks in the middle of the city of Oakland, California. When we met, at the turn of the century, I had recently started GhostTown Farm, one-tenth of an acre farm on squatted land near downtown. Willow had founded City Slicker Farms a few years before, as a nonprofit urban farming organization devoted to making affordable, urban-grown organic produce available to low-income residents in West Oakland. This is the book that we wished we had when we first started out, a how-to manual that speaks directly to farmers trying to grow food and raise animals in the city. We became passionate about urban farming for a variety of reasons. One is the way urban agriculture connects urban people to the food they are eating. The lettuce someone seeds, waters, and then harvests for dinner makes the freshest, most delicious salad they have ever had. Backyard chicken eggs are a revelation, partially because they are so fresh and partially because you raised the hen who laid this special gift. We realized that many city folks don't think they can produce their own food, and so they miss out on these connections. By growing even a little food in the city, these experiences become accessible. Speaking of accessibility, urban farming is a way for people of all income levels to eat fresh, local, organic food. I knew that I didn't have enough money to buy organic produce or meat, and so I decided to raise it myself. An average urban backyard (25 feet by 40 feet), if cultivated intensively, has the potential to grow all of the fruits and vegetables for one person. Growing edibles in the city-even on a deck or small backyard-makes economic sense for people who have more time than money. Due to low incomes and lack of access to grocery stores, urban people fail to get the healthy nutrition they need. A few packets of seeds costing less than twenty dollars can produce enough vegetables for a year's worth of eating. If government regulations were changed and financial support given, many of the fruits and vegetables consumed in a city could be grown within the city itself, through a combination of backyard gardening, community gardening, school gardens, commercial gardens, and increasing urban agriculture on currently unused municipal land. This would mean everyone would have access to healthy organic food!

I say organic because this is the farming method that we encourage everyone to use. Organic means that you don't use chemically synthesized fertilizers or pesticides-two things that your neighbors in the city do not need to be exposed to. Other aspects of organic farming that we encourage, and explain in this book, are: building soil fertility through crop rotation; proper application of compost and green manures; and controlling weeds and pests by mulching, picking by hand, or using natural sprays or mixtures.

Rural organic farms do not necessarily follow practices that are sustainable for the earth, animals, or human beings. Growing in the city also means that you can go a bit beyond organic by growing a variety of crops on one site (instead of growing a single crop [monoculture]), using water efficiently, integrating livestock, and using city wastes to create a more closed-loop nutrient system. This avoids the use of factory-made fertilizers, using fossil fuels for operating farm machinery, or shipping produce and inputs-and, unlike commercial farms, ensures fair and safe labor practices.

Another method of urban farming is intensive farming, which enables growers to achieve high food yields in small spaces. Crops are spaced as tightly as possible and soil fertility is continuously built to support their growth. To achieve the highest yields possible while also maintaining the overall health of the plants and animals, we focus on the soil; because of this, the crops will thrive.

We have taken principles from intensive farming (sometimes called French intensive), biodynamic farming, permaculture, and edible landscaping, rolled them up in a ball and called it urban farming. As you begin to build your urban farm, you'll no doubt encounter other useful methods and ideas. There is no perfect way: raising food is a constantly changing dialogue between you the farmer and the landscape, animals, community members, and political and social circumstances. There is no better time to start urban farms. We're entering a golden era, as farms spring up on rooftops in Brooklyn and Chicago; in abandoned lots in Detroit and San Francisco; in community gardens and in backyards. The thing is, none of this is new! The historical record shows that up until only recently, growing food in cities all over the world was the norm rather than an oddball fad. Think back to ancient Mesopotamia or the Inca empire, both highly urban societies; the people relied on urban and periurban farms for their food. Learn about the French market gardens built during the Paris Commune. Read up on Detroit mayor Hazen Pinagree, who developed a system of farms in Detroit in the 1890s. Remember the victory gardens grown on

the grounds of the White House, in New Yorks Bryant Park, on the grounds of businesses and peoples backyards during both world wars. It wasnt until the 1950s, when the highway systems were built and the era of cheap fossil fuel began, that the strict division between rural and urban began to take shape. In the 1970s, during the oil crisis, an ecological movement started to grow that encouraged self-sufficiency in cities. Books on sustainable living, such as *The Integral Urban House*, demonstrated that one could grow vegetables and raise honeybees and chickens in the city. There is a strong element of social justice in this latest wave of interest in growing food in the city. There is often vacant land in so-called blighted areas empty lots that could be used by the people who live there to produce food. This is why Willow founded City Slicker Farms. With neighborhood support, she started a few gardens on empty lots and set up a farm stand to sell the produce at affordable prices; no one was turned away for lack of funds. Neighbor interest in self-sufficient food production led to the addition a few years later of a backyard garden program for low-income residents. Today City Slicker Farms has built two hundred backyard gardens that produce tens of thousands of pounds of food per year in West Oakland. Urban farming is empowering: It can create self-sufficiency in communities who need it most. A move toward more food production in the city is a way to combat other threats to humanity: climate change, the irresponsible use of fossil fuels, and a ballooning urban waste stream. Small urban farms dont have to use fossil fuel-derived fertilizers or pesticides. Urban-grown produce doesnt need to be shipped in refrigerated trucks or by airplane. We can rechannel the wastes away from landfills and toward productive uses, such as fertilizer. Restaurant food scraps can feed urban chickens and rabbits; busy cabinetry shops can supply shavings for garden paths; coffee grounds from the local caf can be used to make great compost. By recycling wastes we reintroduce city people to that great American ideal of thrift. At the time Willow and I started talking about this book I had just helped launch a store in Berkeley that sells organic locally made animal feeds, farm equipment, and books and tools for self-sufficient living, and that also provides classes about urban chickens, goats, and rabbits. The classes often sold out in a few days, so I knew there was a great hunger to learn these skills. We noticed that there was no definitive how-to manual for setting up, maintaining, and expanding an urban farm and began talking about collecting all the how-to knowledge wed gathered over the previous ten years into a manual. Our goal then was to write that book, to create a one-stop resource for both beginning and seasoned urban farmers. Our years-long efforts to distill our field experience has resulted in *The Essential Urban Farmer*, the book you hold in your hands.

SUSTAINABILITY BULLS-EYE: FARM INPUTS AND OUTPUTS When sourcing materials keep in mind that local is more sustainable. *The Essential Urban Farmer* is divided into three parts and reflects our philosophy: First observe; then take action; then sustain the results; and finally, expand your efforts. The first part, *Designing Your Urban Farm*, can be read as a beginners guide to advance planning. It covers choosing a site, testing the soil, and creating a layout that uses the space you have to grow the most food possible. Though many people want to just dive right in, its often best to first take a step back, assess what you have, and build a strategy. We encourage baby urban farmers to start with small steps, like growing some lettuce or carrots. Then move on to bees or chickens. Youll build on your knowledge base and stay sane by moving slowly. Part II, *Raising City Vegetables and Fruits*, involves getting your hands dirty in order to grow vegetables and fruits. Youll read about how to build soil fertility, set up growing beds, start seedlings, plant seeds and plants, and irrigate your crops. If you live in an apartment or have a small amount of growing space, go to page 113. After youve planted, youll need to learn how to defend your garden (organically, of course) from pests and disease. And then, finally, youll find out about best practices for harvesting your homegrown bounty. If youve already tried your hand at growing vegetables, or have chickens but are looking to expand your farm animal repertoire, Part III, *Raising City Animals*, is for you. This section covers six animals that will thrive on your city farm: honeybees, chickens, ducks, turkeys, rabbits, and dairy goats. There are in-depth directions for setting up housing, feeding, and maintaining your menagerie. Weve also included tips for saving money on your small-scale animal operation by using the citys waste for food, bedding, and building materials. Finally, we also include step-by-step instructions for processing animals for the dinner table. At the back you will find an elaborate resource section that lists materials and tools, places from which to order farm equipment and livestock, listings of urban farms all across the country, tables of information for seed savers, and sample seeding and planting calendars. Since we are based in California, we consulted and visited seasoned practitioners throughout the country to learn about their climate zones. Their best practices are touched on throughout. We are indebted to them, and welcome input from you, our readers, and fellow urban farmers. Whether youre just getting into urban agriculture or at it for a while, were sure youll find something of use here, even if its primarily a sense of solidarity. So please send ideas and other resources to essentialurbanfarmer@gmail.com. Finally, though we often shy away from the R word, we daily see more evidence that urban farming is becoming a real revolution. The most important things that Willow and I have learned havent been about chickens or vegetables, rabbits or fruit trees; it has to do with the people in our communities. Weve seen firsthand the way animals and plants bring our neighbors together. Cultivating life allows people to feel a connection to the earth, and to each other. We encourage you to not just sit with this book but to go out and seek experienced mentors, to gather and share knowledge and resources. We all eat, and the two of us think that if we all grow a little bit of what we eat, the world would be a better place.